

MUHAMMAD HAMIDULLAH

Peacefully and Finally

Allah Granted his every wish

Sadida Athaullah

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MY DADA

by Sadida Athaullah

*The beloved of Allah**Muhammad Hamidullah**Arrived at dawn in 1908**The Sun rising over river Musi**Heard gurgles of a tiny baby with
big beautiful eyes**As yet unaware of life.**My beloved Dada
departed in the afternoon in 2002**The sun stayed behind clouds
the chilly St Johns river
no substitute for Musi*
providing the sand and silt**After almost a century
Living, breathing, writing**To please Allah
Having touched the world**Unimagined by the rest of humanity*

* Like the Thames or Seine, Musi or Musa Nadi flows through the capital, also called Hyderabad; its occasional flooding has been part of folklore. One of its worst floods had happened in 1908, only seven months after Dada's birth. After the floods there was an outbreak of disease killing a large number of infants and old people. Many Hyderabadis who had survived the floods died of disease later.

Dada said his elders used to tell him that they thought that as he did not die at that time, even though a sickly baby, it must have been for good reason and God wanted him to do something in his life. Musa Nadi was, therefore, very important to Dada. We would stroll by the River Seine in Paris and he would call it the Musa Nadi of Paris, and make up some verses about the refugees and homeless having to find their Musa Nadi wherever they happened to end up.

When I brought him to Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, I took him to the River Susquehanna when we shared the old jokes about the Seine. After we moved to Jacksonville on the banks of the St Johns river, in summer I used to take him frequently to sit by the Susquehanna river.



IN the third week of December 2002, the world lost a great Muslim writer, scholar and the last citizen of the State of Hyderabad. I lost my beloved Dada (grandfather), my spiritual guide, mentor and teacher, my adopted father, my surrogate mother, my best friend and confidant, my big brother and my favourite poet. We belong to Allah and to Allah we all return.

Grief stricken as I am, Dada will insist that I answer all your calls and messages, answer every salaam sent to me, as he always did. So with a broken heart I am writing to tell you about the final hours of his life.

We had dinner together on the night of Monday 16 December 2002. I tried to cut his hair and trim his beard. He allowed only his moustache to be trimmed and went to bed shortly after 11.00pm as usual.

Tuesday morning I helped him to get up at 4.00am and began the usual morning routine. He walked without help to the bathroom, showered, had breakfast in the dining area and walked back to bed on his own at 6.00am. He was sitting on the bed as I went to get ready to go to work.

When I looked into his room, as I was ready to leave the house at 6.45am, he was already sleeping peacefully on his side with his face towards the wall.

When I returned home about 1.15pm, he had kept his promise that he had jokingly made in Paris in 1996 that he would not let the Angel of Death take his soul in my presence. (He had breathed his last at around 11.00am according to the doctor.)

Saturday 20 January 1996, he had been rushed to a Paris hospital almost half alive suffering from hypothermia. I reached Paris the very next morning. He was on a life support system. Next day, which was a Monday, I was told that his body system was no more functional and he could not be sustained any more. I was, therefore, asked to give my consent for the tubes to be removed and the system switched off.

It took me three days to agonise and grapple with this difficult dilemma but after a great deal of soul searching, I gave the necessary permission. However, the next morning, to the amazement of his doctors, he was sitting up on his own, eating his

breakfast. He wanted to start fasting because he had not missed a fast in Ramadan since he was nine-years-old.

He was apologetic that I had to suffer the pain of giving permission for his departure from this world and in an attempt to make him laugh I demanded that he would not die in front of me. He was amused at such a request but said that was not possible, but if it was, he would make whatever bargain that may be necessary with the angel of death and the people who came to take him for his last journey, and try not to depart in my presence.

He had departed today. There was a slight smile on his face; his legs were stretched out with his hands folded as if he was standing in salat (prayers). When I walked in I knew he was gone because he always slept with his legs close to his body.

I called Irfan Khalilullah, my brother, at work and Dr Yusuf Ziva Kavakci, Dada's student from Turkey and the Imam of Dallas, in Dallas¹ to come and attend to Dada's final needs. After Irfan arrived in a few minutes, we called Dr Sadia, a Hyderabad physician who lives in the neighbourhood. She confirmed what we already knew. With her help, Irfan and I re-positioned his bed mindful of the direction of Makkah al- Mukarramah, with his head lifted slightly, as we had seen our elders do in Hyderabad.

¹ Former Dean and Professor of Islamic Law at the College of Islamic Studies, Ataturk University, Erzurum, Turkey, and now director and imam at the Islamic Centre of Dallas, Dallas, Texas.

We also called his attending physician, Dr Obaidullah Ahmad, who had provided medical care and home visits since we moved to Jacksonville. Indeed without his loving personal care for the last three years, we may have had to hospitalise Dada.

After talking to the police, Sister Nailah Bolden, whose mother, Rajah Matthews, was buried recently in the same graveyard, and Sister Najmah Shabazz, my friend and colleague, called the funeral home and the cemetery officials. We received permission to keep Dada at home and take him direct to the graveyard as soon as the grave was ready.

We turned on the AC, packed the room with ice and turned on the fans to cool the room. Dr Yusuf Kavakci from Dallas and Reihan, my brother, from Lancaster Pennsylvania, arrived in Jacksonville by 10.00pm and a few local Muslims, probably well under 50, called to pay their respects.

Reihan and I sat all night with Dada as Irfan got the burial shroud, arranged for the grave digging and made all the arrangements to wash and prepare the body next morning with the help of local brothers.

Junaid and Muzaffar Adil, my cousins from New Jersey and Chicago, arrived the next morning.

After Fajr on Wednesday, Dr Yusuf Kavakci, Irfan, Reihan and two or three neighbours washed Dada in the patio and laid him out in the dining area, in the same spot where he had his last meal, less than 24 hours ago. We then waited for the final arrangements.

At 12.15pm Dada began his last journey to his resting place on St Johns Bluff. Irfan, Reihan, Junaid, Dr Yusuf Kavakci and other brothers carried him in their arms to the van, and wrapped in an additional sheet to prevent his burial shroud touching unclean surfaces.

He arrived at Chapel Hill Cemetery. Brother Adam Ferreti applied 'itr (natural scent extracted from flowers), which he had received as a gift in Makkah al-Mukarramah when he had accepted Islam.

There were about 70 men and five women at the graveyard. And Dr Yusuf Kavakci led the prayers.

The Jacksonville imam, Hafiz Zaid Malik, Irfan and others went into the grave and Dr Yusuf Kavakci, Dr Muzaffar, Dr Junaid and Dr Reihan lowered Dada into it.

Whenever I would say, 'I think you need to see a doctor.' Dada would joke that the Doctor of doctors is already in the house and doesn't need to see a doctor. The 'Doctor of doctors' was entrusted to the sands of St Johns River.

Dada loved the old trees in Paris and frequently mentioned the Neem and Tamarind trees of Hyderabad. Today he is shaded by a grand old live oak tree and I plan to plant a pomegranate tree by the fence.

He is buried in the first row of graves so there is no one above him. He is at the end of the row, so no one will be buried next to him on the left. On the right, he is in the company of a 83-year-old female writer², a Muslim writer-activist and young mother³, who died of complications giving birth to twin boys, and a two-year-old child⁴. It seems Allah granted Dada his every wish, including the occupants of neighbouring graves, for writers and children were always his preferred companions.

He wanted to be ‘that fortunate man who lived and worked and died in anonymity and acknowledged 200 years after his death’.

And he got that too. May Allah shower him with His blessings, and give him everything he may have missed here.

² Sister Rajah Matthews who recently passed away after suffering from cancer for a few months. She had returned to Islam late in life and loved Islam so much that she wanted to share it with all whom she met. She wrote a book on Islam and published it herself and gave all proceeds to the local Islamic school. She also helped set up the Islamic library at the school and was a frequent volunteer at the Masjid.

³ Tonya Hussain was a Muslim writer- activist, a graphic artist working on Islamic art. She used to organise many of the local Muslim youth activities.

⁴ Armaan Sulaiman.

I pray that Allah gives me the strength to live to please Allah and forgives anything I may have done otherwise.

Please keep me in all your prayers.

[Sadida Athaullah is Dr. Hamidullah's Literary Executrix and grandniece.]

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Remember us in your prayers:

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Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's Graveyard

Sign at the entrance to funeral home. Pictured is Dr. Yusuf Ziya Kavakci and the grand-grand niece (Sumayya) of Dr. Hamidullah.



Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's Graveyard

Sign on the front entrance to the graveyard where Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah is buried.



Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's Graveyard

Funeral home building. Pictured is Dr. Kavakci and Sumayya (grand-grand niece of Dr. Hamidullah).



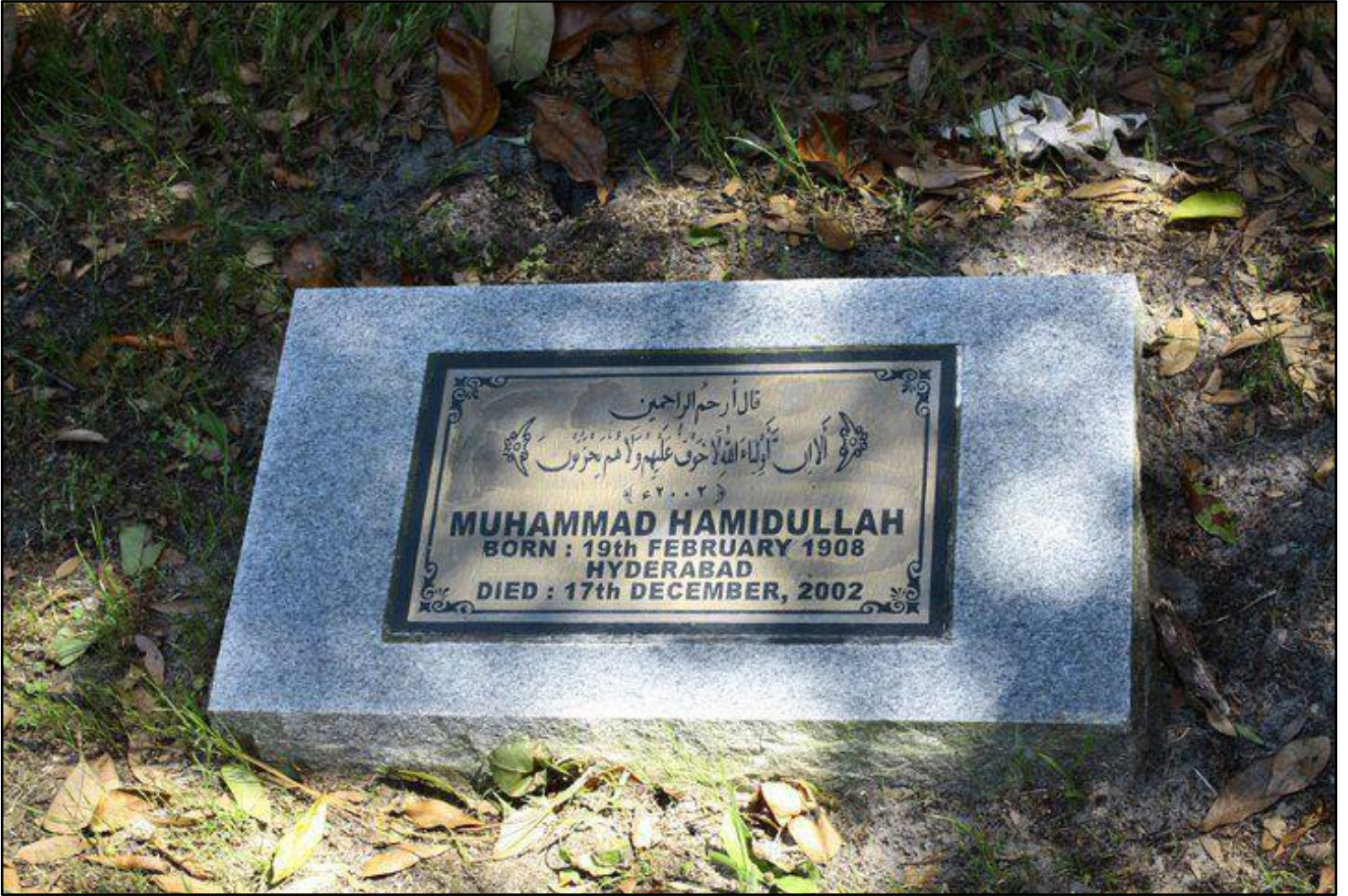
Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's Graveyard

Gulhan Kavakci and Sumayya visiting the grave of Dr. Hamidullah.
(JAN 1, 2003).



Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah's Graveyard

Dr. Yusuf Ziya Kavakci and Gulhan Kavakci were students of Dr. Hamidullah for many years. Here they are seen at Hamidullah's grave (JAN 1, 2003).



new tombstone installed....

May Dr Sahib's Soul Rest in Peace